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Guelaguetza and Tu Chha'ia: A Zapotec Perspective of What Others Call Friendship

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Each people's peace is as distinct as each people's poetry.

Ivan Illich

In the house in Mexico City, where Gustavo Esteva was born, his grandmother could not enter through the front door, because she was an Indian. Like many other people of her generation, his mother assumed that the best she could do for her children was to radically uproot them from their indigenous ancestry, in order to avoid the exclusion and discrimination she had suffered. But Esteva adored his grandmother and spent many holidays with her in Oaxaca, in her Zapotec world.

Like many other people of his generation, Esteva reclaimed his own cultural roots late in his life. In his early 40s, when he was suffering the collective frustration with development and he was trying to discover his own path, he began to remember his experiences with his grandmother and such memories reconnect him with his people at the grassroots. He now lives in a Zapotec village, near the place where his grandmother was born.

Arturo Guerrero has a very different story...but it follows similar lines of alienation and rediscovery.

This chapter is about the Zapotecs, the largest Indian pueblo¹ of Oaxaca and one of the most important and numerous indigenous groups in Mexico and even the American continent. There are at least half a million people who are known

* We are particularly grateful for the contributions of Melquiades Cruz, Zapotec from the Rincón, who guided us along these explorations and in particular who shared with us the inspiration of his grandfather, Don Pablo Cruz, from Santa Cruz Yagajila. We have used in this text modified fragments of the article 'Els zapóteques: L'harmonia com a justícia' (Esteva, 2004).

to speak Zapotec. Perhaps another half a million consider themselves Zapotec, but have lost mastery of the language. Many Zapotecs are part of the indigenous diaspora: there are more Zapotecs living out of Oaxaca than in Oaxaca.

We will refer to the Zapotecs here, but we have the impression that the Zapotec² pueblo never existed, does not exist at the present and will probably never come into existence, in the sense that they are not a 'group of people who share a history, culture, territory and project.' Zapotec intellectuals suggesting today the 'reconstitution' of the Zapotec pueblo are applying to the Zapotecs a nineteenth century ideological construct arbitrarily projected on people who, in their majority, have no interest in such a political initiative and ideology. While colonial domination certainly had a disjointed impact, no fragmentation occurred. The Spaniards did not fragment something that was united, which formed a unit, which had some form of organic integration, economic, political or cultural. On the other hand, what can currently be said about all Zapotec communities is irrelevant, superficial and inaccurate. These are generalizations without much substance or empirical basis. The assumptions common to all of them, their horizons of intelligibility, which perhaps could characterize a Zapotec culture common to all who are considered Zapotec, have not been subjected to systematic exploration. We do not know if there really is such a level of communion. Apparently, they have formed what would more precisely be called multicultural configurations on a regional level.

If there is not a 'Zapotec pueblo'³ and none of the Zapotec languages have a word for peace (or war), how can we address the question of the meaning of peace among the Zapotec people?

Words are the symbolic expression of the real world, the way in which reality is manifested in us (through a symbol). With them, we build concepts, which are the ways in which we imagine and represent the patterns of what exists and its passing. Words and concepts are always culturally ingrained: they belong to a place. Only there, in a specific cultural territory, do words and concepts acquire their meaning, in their interconnection with the semantic constellation to which they belong.

To explore the meaning of peace among the Zapotec, who lack an equivalent word, is not merely a linguistic problem. Many of our Zapotec interlocutors speak Spanish fluently. They know what the word peace means 'out there' in the larger society. In conversation between Zapotecs, one can insert the Spanish word, *paz*, with the contemporary meaning derived from the *pax romana* and updated in the *pax americana* as a contract of domination. It is a meaning that the Zapotecs have directly suffered under for more than 500 years. This very reality underscores the difficulty of expressing this concept in Zapotec. Whenever we raised the question with Zapotecs it produced bewilderment. An initial response seems to coincide with other traditions. *Chiinula* or *chhiz*, in the Zapotec of Sierra Juárez, means 'to choose not to confront,' 'to leave in peace,' 'to not make noise,' 'to

not get to you,' alluding primarily to those from outside, to the government, for example. Generally, it means to be in a situation free of external pressures. It is a notion to which Illich* had made reference: 'At the center, the emphasis is on "the maintenance of peace"; at the margin, people hope "to be left in peace"' (Illich, 1981, p. 1). The confusion arises when the term is applied inwardly or alludes to a condition that not only relates to what the other does (who chooses not to confront one, who leaves one be), but to the relation itself, to the state of things existing in this relation, which seems to lead to multiple directions and which is only understood, from outside, through appreciation of the context.

In everyday practice, the peoples of the Sierra, the Zapotecs, Chinantecs and Mixes of the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca, speak of being well together, of sharing, of giving a hand to each other. But the contemporary concept of peace does not seem to relate to this. Illich himself warned that 'the peace of every nation is as different as the poetry of every nation. Hence, the translation of peace is as arduous a task as the translation of poetry' (Illich, 1981, p. 1). This chapter deals not simply with translation, but with the search for homeomorphic equivalents that yield a plurality of ideas: the search does not give primacy to a specific concept of the dominant culture, but seeks to identify equivalent conditions for a social function that seems to exist, with multiple variants and meanings, in diverse cultures.

Only through unbearable distortions can the practices which occupy the homeomorphic equivalents of that social function in all Zapotec communities be reconciled. In order to give the appropriate context to the exploration, we will refer to ways of being that seem common to the majority of Indian communities in Mesoamerica, not only to the Zapotec, and ways of being that seem common to the regional and cultural configuration of Sierra Juárez of Oaxaca, where Zapotecs, Chinantecs and Mixes coexist. However, our elaboration concentrates on a small region of Sierra Juárez: our interpretations as to the meaning of 'peace' can only be strictly applied to this small region. While we are confident that they could also apply to other regions, and perhaps even to other Mesoamerican pueblos, to do so would require many qualifications and distinctions that cannot be made here.

To be Zapotec

According to identified archeological evidence, the first human settlements in the territories of what are now the Mexican states of Oaxaca and Puebla appeared nine or ten thousand years ago. Other evidence indicates that four or five thousand years ago the family of Zapotec languages that are spoken today emerged. There are profound variations between them. Even among those who speak Zapotec,

* Ed. For more on Ivan Illich contributions as peace thinker, see Chapter 28.

the variations are not mutually comprehensible. But these languages have some common patterns that scholars can detect.⁴

Those who spoke these languages lived for a long time in small, independent villages, often forming regional communities. Within the regional communities, one of the villages was assigned the function of being the ceremonial center, although apparently this did not imply an administrative or political role. Two thousand five hundred years ago, some of these regional communities seem to have formed a type of confederation, which preceded the establishment of an urban lifestyle in what is now known as Monte Albán. Here in the first part of our era, between the years 200 and 750 CE, a large human settlement flourished, perhaps one of the largest cities of the world in its time. In the eighth century, it began its decline and for centuries suffered continuous deterioration, while other centers consolidated.

In 1521, the little resistance that the Spaniards encountered in Oaxaca ended. Although there were skirmishes with Zapotecs from different regions, alliances were soon arranged. During the colonial period, the Zapotecs suffered forms of political, economic and religious oppression characteristic of this regime, often with the intermediation of their own political and religious authorities. At the end of the period, almost all regional structures had been dismantled and the Zapotecs survived in relatively isolated rural communities.

At the end of the colonial rule, among nearly all of the Zapotecs, as within other groups as well, a communal reaffirmation of the relationship with the earth as both a sacred and worldly place was consolidated. This communion was shared by all members of the community even when they were no longer living on this land – an attitude that is still maintained in most communities that are considered Zapotec and which experts call residential identity.

The current way of life in these communities perhaps provides historic continuity to ancient traditions, in which the rooting to a particular place stimulates diversity. Even today, every community maintains a distinct way of life that defines its existence. This unique vision may surface in the neighboring communities with which there is frequent interaction. In some cases, a common cultural sphere is recognized with other communities in a small area and a form of fraternity is recognized with the larger regional community.

In any case, from both within and outside of the community people tend to distinguish between the Zapotec communities of the central valleys, of the Northern and Southern Sierra and of the Isthmus. The areas occupied by these communities represent almost half the land area of the state of Oaxaca and constitute the Zapotec territory. In recent years, this territory has extended to other parts of Mexico and the United States. In addition to the Zapotec communities that may be found in urban neighborhoods, 'transnational communities' have also emerged, in some of which the same group of people may in turn reside in two countries (Kearney, 1996).

To be Zapotec today is an attitude and a state of mind that only acquires full meaning, rigor and exactness within rural communities and some urban neighborhoods, which maintain their own fitting cultural rule of life.

The pursuit of harmony

The shared life of a 'Zapotec' community is based on dynamic customs embodied in changing behaviors. One or another community shows such differences in form and substance, that generalizations imply reductions or unacceptable distortions. The terms and concepts available, even those that have already entered into this text despite the authors' resistance, 'habits' and 'behavior,' seem inappropriate for discussing the issue that we want to address. How do you talk of 'peace' in communities where the word is unknown and in which the notions of law and rights that could give context to it are not only unknown but irrelevant? * Communities where the ideas of 'justice' and 'social order' are entirely foreign or have radically different meanings than the conventional understanding? The differences are not just procedural, but of substance. They are based on different presuppositions.⁵

The traditions associated with certain words illustrate the difficulty. For those who read this text, legality is associated with law and justice, jurisdiction is an area of authority, a jury is a judicial body. But legality and jurisdiction were born under circumstances in which the word was law. They are derived from *dicere*, 'to say' and *dictio*, 'the action of saying, statement,' associated with *jus*, *juris*, what relates to the law. The jury comes from swear, 'to make a solemn declaration invoking a deity.' In many Indian communities, what we call 'legal' has some resemblance with what the origins of these words mean, but not what they mean today. Despite its gradual subjugation to the kingdom of the alphabet, the oral way of being still defines their life.[†]

In 1997 in Oaxaca, intense discussions took place concerning a new law on indigenous pueblos and communities, which, among other things, sought to recognize their 'internal normative systems' in positive law and bring them under formal regulation.[‡] In those discussions, Zapotec and Mixe lawyers vigorously defended the oral nature of their rules of conduct. They strongly resisted any attempt to enclose them in a text. They knew well the consequences

* Ed. For more on the impossibility of translations of key words, such as peace, see Chapters 7 and 21.

† Ed. In this book, manifold chapters underline the importance of oral traditions to comprehend, experience and grasp peace. To find discussions on this topic in other cultures, i.e. in non-Native American cultures, see especially Chapters 7 and 10 on the Middle East.

‡ Ed. A thorough discussion on legal systems and the differences between restorative and retributive justice, oral processes of healing and their difference from the punitive positive system in regards peace can be found in Chapter 17.

of subordinating their lives to the straightjackets imposed through written legislation on various themes, such as agricultural property and agricultural property rights. They did not want these restrictions to continue expanding. In support of their argument, they cited numerous cases as proof of the vitality, dynamism and flexibility of their oral 'legal culture' and of the conflicts created by the written word.⁶

Defending the oral form of 'internal normative systems' signified the protection of a way of being and living and the prevention of the scourge of written rules being extended to other areas. A couple of features of these 'systems' can illustrate this style of functioning.

Differential treatment

'Each theft of a turkey is different,' said Hugo. 'Why treat them as if they were all alike?'

Among the Zapotecs there does not appear to be egalitarian obsessions and manias of uniformity. What seems correct, what is right, is not associated with the idea of giving everyone the same treatment or of applying the rule in the same way in all cases. The Zapotecs are aware that they are persons, knots of relationships; below every individual skin is a bearer of these nets, who is recognized as such and treated accordingly, as the distinct person he or she is, not as the homogeneous atom of an abstract category.* The circumstances of each event are also different and should be carefully taken into account. Although the same person commits the same offence, he does so in different circumstances that must be weighed. These attitudes often cause great concern among the state authorities and human rights activists who are convinced of the universal validity of the ideal of equality and individual rights.⁷

Each case is different, just as each person is different. There are no written rules or uniform definitions. And yet, even the children know what to do when someone commits an offence. If the case goes to an authority, social control is exercised in the observation of the person who is involved: all are attentive to what the authorities will decide. The deviation from what is considered appropriate would have serious consequences.

'Westerners represent the figure of justice as a blindfolded woman,' Marcos said one day. 'We want her with her eyes wide open, so that she can see, with care, all the circumstances of each case and consider well the differences between people.'

Consolation and compensation

The immediate reaction to the person who has committed an offence is to meet his need for help, perhaps consolation. It is assumed that such a person is in distress. For many, it is likely that they require supernatural assistance.

* Ed. For the problematization of autonomous subject and individual and how it can be viewed as relational, see Chapters 1 and 7.

In some Zapotec communities, the person who has committed a serious misconduct, a crime for example, is immediately tied to a tree, to the great displeasure and concern of human rights activists. He is not being punished. It is to allow time for the elderly to come and talk with him. They will try to bring him back from the delirious state that assumedly took control over him. Only out of his mind could he have committed the offense. Once they have heard him, and he has been able to explain himself and they have been able to fully understand the matter, he regains complete freedom.

From that moment on, what is important is the compensation to the victim of the offense. In most cases, the result is known by all. Sometimes it is simply to repair the damage, for example covering for the value of a damaged cornfield, providing a number of turkeys or goats equivalents to those that were stolen or abused, and so on. Other times, the offense generates a permanent, or at least prolonged, responsibility. The person who committed a crime, for example, is now economically responsible for the family of the dead person. As a result of the burden of the two families, he may have to migrate to the United States regularly, to earn some dollars. For him, escape would be worse than prison or death. Usually he becomes a hard-working, complying citizen. The community recognizes and appreciates his effort and responsibility. Many times no stigma is laid upon him, but in the case of a serious crime, the person is not allowed to have important *cargos* in the community since he has lost his moral authority.

Governing bodies which resolve conflicts

The intense vitality of communities, the density of their relationships and interactions and the splendid differentiation between the people, favors the proliferation of conflicts, which have worsened with the broadening and deepening of the relationship with other cultures and the larger society. Conflicts are appearing which, until recently, were entirely unheard of, such as those related to the economy.

Most of the conflicts are resolved between those directly involved or with the intervention of their immediate or extended families. Some cases, however, do not achieve resolution there and are taken to the local authorities, which have different levels and areas of responsibility, and sometimes even other governing bodies.

In many communities, the agents of the solution can have a supernatural nature. In the same way that the offense or the conflict can be attributed to them, their help can be sought to resolve it. A witch, a healer or a priest can be an effective intermediary for this purpose and can directly contribute to the solution, including, in its appropriate place, the phase of atonement.

Mayors, municipal presidents and communal judges deal with different types of offenses and proceed conforming to the recognized rules, which, in various

jurisdictions, primarily serve to define the gravity of the offense. Written records of the trials are known to exist, as it is customary to maintain them in many communities, but the 'trials' themselves are conducted as conversations induced by the authorities as they try to discover the root causes of the conflict and at the same time guide the inquiry to the expected outcome: through their intervention, they seek to lead to the reestablishment of harmony between the parties.

In general, it is thought that to maintain a grievance is bad for the health of both the person and the community. It is necessary to release it, although this does not need to happen immediately. Sometimes the injury can wait until one of the large fiestas in the village, which are spaces that are suitable for airing old and new grievances and settling them within the general festive spirit, conducive to conciliation.

Exceptionally, when all these mechanisms have proved futile and the grievance persists, the person who still feels the grievance can turn to other governing bodies, whether they be regional, which have the same character – to the head of the administrative district, for example – or the state or federal governing bodies, which apply conventional legal procedures to which have recently been incorporated the obligation, rarely fulfilled, to rigorously take into account the indigenous condition of plaintiffs and defendants.

The path of atonement

Very diverse communal mechanisms try to encourage the balancing of all involved (without equalizing or standardizing) and to continually adjust the norms, both in terms of ideas and behavior, so that everyone can fulfill them and avoid conflicts. But inevitably some conflicts arise. People deviate from the norms. They commit errors that affect everyone else.

The overall dedication that is seen in everyone, from families to the authorities and the courts, reflects a deep concern for the harmony that was lost. Attempts are made to reestablish it. This is what is considered truly important. We already indicated that they do not seek to punish those who committed an offense. If the offense is severe, an attempt is made to provide support, natural or supernatural. They arrange the compensation to the victim. But all this has to be at the service of the most important thing: the cultivation of harmony among the people in conflict. It is something that moves beyond forgiveness.

In these villages, gossip is an act of introspection. People belong to the community and the community belongs to them, but perhaps the reality is not reflected in these terms. All of them *are* the community. The settling of issues between them, after a conflict, is like confronting oneself and fixing the disorder that is produced internally. It is a question of being internally calm, of dealing with one's own demons in order to keep them under control. It means to live in peace.

The oral form of existence

Orality is the technology with which the distinct We of the community maintains the homeostasis, the balance, of the world. To recreate with the spoken word a present in precarious equilibrium, always in relation to the external Other, separates those memories which are no longer relevant and begins to consider and create new hopes. The present requires a fitting forgetfulness. It is in the concrete reality of the situation where the words acquire their meaning. Each time the speaker accommodates himself to a different audience and confronts new situations: the art of the oral tradition is rooted precisely in the daily play between memory and hope.

In everyday conversation, the repetition of stories and cultural formulas is evident. Everyone knows them. They know the gestures. They have seen and heard all this again and again, and, every time, enjoy the same story or cultural formulas, woven into recent or new stories. Thus they participate in the communion, the everyday sharing, with 'established' phrases infinitely repeated, in which what matters is precisely the celebration of the common experience and the reaffirmation of Us in front of the external Other.

The oral tradition does not contain the complex categories found in writing. In the oral tradition, thought and expression relate to what is one's own, people to which one is close to, the street and the flower, the known and recognized of our living environment, the everyday reality. In general, everyday communication is a story that describes the personal relations between Us and the Others.*

The *serrana* community is a zone of verbal challenge. Proverbs, riddles, jokes, insults, the evasion of direct answers, beating around the bush and responding with other questions are some manifestations of this daily combat, a battle of wits where you can seek to wound the adversary, but also pursue favor and kindness, grace (see below).

Unlike what occurs in writing, established, linear and reversible, in the oral tradition there is nothing to return to in order to confirm what was said, because once said, it disappears. But to repeat what was just said, continually engaging in redundancy, is a way for those speaking to remain in tune with one another. The speaker must repeat the same thing or something similar several times for it to be understood (there is always someone who will not understand); to continue and insist upon certain ideas, creating what might be called 'contingent formulas,' relevant only within a particular discourse or way of speaking.

The communal experience of social relationships

Displacing the exploration of peace to the exploration of harmony, as we do in the preceding paragraphs, does not completely resolve the difficulty. Between the

* Ed. In Chapter 18, Robert Vachon brings to his chapter a centuries-old ceremonial oral traditional 'prayer,' offering a practical example of the arguments put forward here by Esteva and Guerrero.

people of the Sierra, there is not any word that uniquely expresses the meaning of the term harmony. There appear a number of expressions, meanings and practices that are organized and recreated every day. To identify equivalencies there remains the need to explore generalized principles, such as *guelaguetza* and reciprocity, together with other components of communal life that give substance to the 'harmonious condition' and allow others to begin to see the communal horizon. As we move closer to the everyday experience, in the morphology of Santa Cruz Yagavila, in the Rincón of the Sierra Juárez, we seem to find in the notions of *tu chh'ia* and *waka lenbēchi luuzaro* a concrete form of the communal principles of reciprocity and *guelaguetza*, in what would be a local way of naming the conditions which create harmony, as we will discuss below.

In order to appreciate the mental space that operates as a framework for the communal experience, we need to appeal to the notion of communality:⁸ the all-encompassing myth of the communal Oaxacan world, the horizon of intelligibility derived from the movement and the interpenetration of two juxtaposed spirals.

First, the spiral *outward*, formed by relations with the other since the Conquest, in which the communal We is constructed into a subordinate position. As each external imposition generates resistance, it constitutes an adaptation: it introduces into the communal world an innovation that is deemed necessary in order to endure, because without it a confrontation would be produced that would lead to destruction. And second, the spiral *inward*, whose root core is (i) the communal territory, in which (ii) authority fulfills an organizational function beginning with (iii) communal work and (iv) fiestas, creating a world through (v) the vernacular language. These five elements are the foundation of communality. To share the myth, the horizon of intelligibility, is to create a territory, as a realization of everyday politics. This is not merely a discourse: it is expressed in the form of making decisions and of carrying out collective work; in the encounter of action, word and creation; in the conviviality between us, with others, the world and the unspeakable, with a disposition of service for the common good.

In searching on this horizon for a common understanding, between different communities, pueblos and languages of the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca, which may represent a homeomorphic equivalent of harmony, the dual order of the *guelaguetza* and reciprocity appears.

The *guelaguetza* is the aesthetic beginning of the communality: the celebration of sharing, the experience of being together and sharing a common feeling. It is kinship, friendship, what it is to be neighbors, the fact of belonging to a community, the fact of being close and being a fellow human being. According to Andrés Henestrosa, Zapotec of the Isthmus, '*guelaguetza* means that spirit of service between men, in the certainty that all joys and misfortunes can occur within a given moment appropriate to each' (Henestrosa, 2001, p. 16). It is the

disposition and the act of walking with another at my side in the key moments of life. Mutual help among relatives, friends and godparents in the community municipality, in celebration or in ill health.

The *guelaguetza*, the shared and joyful experience, is, ultimately, the shared realization of the communal, whose generating ethos is reciprocity, the imperative that weaves the Us. Reciprocity appears as a commitment and obligation among people close to one another, which establishes a complex system of material, symbolic and emotional exchanges of mutual aid, where a sense of community ownership and personal freedom is forged. It is the normative framework of the movement that again and again weaves the interdependence between *serranos*, creating new links, between them and the gods and the dead, and thus recreating the communal territory.

Reciprocity appears, therefore, as the ethical principle of communality. If a person dies in the community, the people close to him will take coffee, wood or anything else to the family for use during the wake and the rosaries. This family will do the same at the next opportunity, not necessarily for another death. Even more, the service one offers to the community through *cargos* appears as a duty woven into the very reciprocity by which the community exists.

The *guelaguetza* and reciprocity are basic complementary principles and practices among the pueblos of Oaxaca. They are known as *guendalizá*, *mano vuelta*, *guetz*, *gozona* and other names, and form part of the secret of the resistance. Jaime Martínez Luna, Zapotec of Guelatao, has attempted to update in Spanish the concept of *guelaguetza* with the neologism *compartencia* (the sharing), which means 'an activity that involves respect, dedication and consistency' (Martínez, 2003, p. 38). It is comprised of sharing life willingly and participating the grace fully in the festive celebration of Us. In this sense, the verbs participate (reciprocity) and share (*guelaguetza*) define the ontology of community. In the very movement from the ethical to the aesthetic that they generate lies the art of communal proportion, the way in which harmony is cultivated in this world.

With the *guelaguetza* and reciprocity, the social fabric is woven and the territory is re-created each day. This creative act requires the free decision that may be exercised from the foundations of the myth by the communal authority, through the two institutions with which this authority is made concrete in the structural dimension of the world: the assembly and the *cargo* system. The assembly will ultimately determine the validity of the *guelaguetza* and reciprocity in the communal space; it gives them practical application and ensures, as far as possible, their continuity and permanence.

The assembly is the highest forum of reflection, discussion and communal decision making. It is the constituent We. Every We within the fabric – family, godparents, neighbors, neighborhoods, committees, music bands, religious fraternities, brotherhoods and a long list of other knots within networks of relationships – has its assembly. But only the general assembly of citizens and

community members determines how to share the territory and maintain the *guelaguetza*. The assembly embodies the communal power: its dignity. At its center, decisions are made by consensus, often the result of lengthy discussions. Every citizen has the right to have their say on the issues of community interest and is obliged to hear the positions of others, until, through complex and subtle mechanisms, the whole group is able to reach a consensual decision.

In the assembly, the face-to-face encounter between citizens is assured and appointments are made for those who will occupy different *cargos*, from which the agreements which were reached will be implemented. These appointments may be revoked at the moment that the assembly considers it necessary.

There, in the assembly, the two main types of relations are regulated and defined, the two spirals of communality: the inward (between us) and the outward (with the Other, both regional and extra-regional). Thus, in the assembly authorities are appointed, the governing bodies which are necessary for the functioning of the community are generated (such as committees) and work for the common good is organized (the *tequios*). Therefore, the assembly is the method of confronting together the problems of all, although this may imply an injury to a person, family or group. Communal well-being, harmony, is largely a result of the work fulfilled in the assembly. There, conflicts are recognized and measures to resolve them are decided upon, both of which are mechanisms for maintaining order. The communal is a world so convulsed by the tensions inside/outside, that it must be recreated every day.

In the assembly it is decided who will organize the fiesta for the patron saint; the destruction with hammers of a local food vendor located on communal territory off the road, by considering its operation outside of the norms of conviviality; or the decision to use the resources from a communal forestry in a remote community in the Sierra, to build a giant gymnasium, a decision that may seem foolish but that has a clear logic: the community's needs are covered by remittances from migrants, and the money that was produced through the sale of the trees might create discord. It seems better to build the most incredible basketball court in the region, which will distinguish the image of this community in the regional system of power and, above all, with such up-to-date facilities from the 'first-world,' will create a bridge between the traditional community and the recreation of that same community among migrants in the United States.

In intercommunity relations, the general assembly of citizens from each community plays a cardinal role in determining the ways in which each community will satisfy the *guelaguetza*. In general, when there are differences at this level of the social fabric, it is not a problem between individuals, but of the affairs between communities. Intercommunity conflicts are confronted from the assembly of each community in conflict. In these cases, decisions are made in the presence of the enemy, the friend and the neighbors, for example when problems concerning territorial limits between neighboring communities arise.

If there is the need to take extreme measures, the assembly determines such measures by consensus and assumes the responsibility for the decision itself and the consequences of the decision. The same principle applies when the music band from the village participates in the fiesta held by the neighboring population, or in the case of the siege imposed by one community on another, in the turbulent second decade of the twentieth century.

Harmony in regional, sectorial, micro-regional and municipal spaces involves a complex give-and-take in the communal assemblies. 'Better a bad settlement than a good lawsuit' is a saying that applies widely in the region, to underline the importance of agreement among different groups.

Work, another foundation of communality, is made concrete in the *tequio*, which is both a collective creation for the common good and one of the main mechanisms to facilitate processes of communal identification and differentiation. The *tequio* is the free and compulsory service that all members of the community provide, so that everyone can help meet the community's needs and solve the problems of everyday life. The call to perform *tequio* originates from the assembly. The authority is responsible for coordinating and organizing the effort that the assembly calls for. The assembly oversees and sanctions the performance of everyone in the *tequios*.

The value of the service is the gift itself, the personal fulfillment which occurs when each person gives his best in the shared *tequio*, or in the assigned *cargo*. We suspect that *tequio* and service are largely the instrument and the mindset that construct communal harmony. In both, the recognition of the other being in Us and of a shared destiny is completed for and with the other, and gratuitously realizes their very existence in this exchange, in this sacrifice. The counterpart of work is the fiesta and the counterpart of service is grace.

The fiesta is closely related to communal harmony: it is one of its foundations. Its liberating force, its excesses, its encounters and departures, which in the fiesta recreate the communal, are well known. The living and the dead reunite and commemorate, mutual promises are made; the life that everyone shares is celebrated, despite the sorrows; and in the fiesta an economic balancing mechanism is practiced within the community: it is common for those with greater revenues to assume a larger responsibility for the expenses of the celebration. The fiesta is a way of recreating communal land in distant territories, in a context of migration. In the fiesta the Us acquires an immediate and visible reality; relatives, friends and godparents are reunited, and everyone lives the *guelaguetza* and renews their hopes. They worked throughout the year for this moment, when the designated provisions are consumed and the best dress clothes worn. Those who normally stay in their homes and on their grounds go out on the streets or in the square, and there they dance, eat, chat, drink and laugh. In communality there is sacrifice, but joy is just as inherent to life as work.

Grace represents the value of the encounter and assumes that someone realized a full service: it is the radiance that is produced between the one who gives the best of himself and those who receive this gift. Grace is receptivity, the recognition of the gift that the other gave, or the recognition on the part of the other for what one provides. Nobody can give himself the gift, but it is possible to receive it from another – God, people who one is close to, or the supernatural – and enjoy it together. If one has the appropriate disposition, one will capture the spark that exists in what the other gives, will recognize the abundance of the world, will judge out loud or in silence that this person, action, saying, contains the grace in the moment of joy. Grace is a briefly shared illumination. In acknowledging the gift, given by the other, one appreciates what was received, literally, with pleasure – thus, one reciprocates it –, a personal pleasure, which rebinds the collective in the sparkle of the *guelaguetza*.

We need the other so that life may pass with grace. One or the other fosters grace, so that all can enjoy it. Grace is the value that we attribute to the actions of others, or that they attribute to our actions, when this gesture, word or maneuvering has, in addition to its meaning in a particular context, to its truth or falsity and its practical utility, a singular sense of beauty that reunites people and makes life more enjoyable for Us.

One's behavior, work and commitment are recognized; it is acknowledged that this vital exchange creates a better world. For this reason, grace is a double demand, because it is hoped, within the myth, that one fulfills a certain dose of grace in what one does and gives to others. It is not enough to get things right, not enough to simply fulfill your obligations. It is necessary to give it a flavor: a soup prepared reluctantly, without pleasure, may be very nutritious, or be ready just in time, but will not taste good, will not have grace. It is the receiver who qualifies, but the server, the giver of the gift, will have to work hard to ensure that his creation is fresh and powerful. It is not for him to decide or to judge if what he provides has grace, because grace is not in him or in what he does, but rather emerges in the joyous encounter with the other, if it is in the server to dedicate all his efforts, so that his work is also a subtle blessing for all. But it is also a requirement for the person receiving the gift. Finally, it is he who judges whether grace has occurred. This means being open to looking, listening, being prepared to feel. The receiver gives himself in the very act of receiving and shares in the received. Without an attitude of listening, no word is of value: the speaker can give his maximum, but grace will not occur, because there is no one to embrace it.

In morphological terms, grace emerges when one misses it. It is easier to name it in its absence. Such as when one observes an indolent attitude and thinks, 'they do not have even a little grace....'

The manner in which the principle of complementarity is related to harmony can be observed in three cases: the two spirals, inwards and outwards, of

the all-encompassing myth; the three dimensions, mythical, structural and morphological, of the communal world; the five fundamentals of communality: territory, authority, work, language and fiesta. In all three cases, the items are related in solidarity with one another, collaborating in the creation of reality. The spiral inward is different from the spiral outward, but cannot be separated from it: both rotations accomplish the communal. The myth, the structure and the morphology of the world are not hierarchical or progressive levels; they appear as the sides of a cube, simultaneous, distinct and indispensable to each other. The territory only exists when a community exercises its authority through work and the spoken word, and thus finds the conditions in which to celebrate.

The isolation or the sovereignty of any of the elements is unthinkable: whether it be a relationship between two, three or more components, the logic of the relationship is that of complementarity. While each element of the relationship is different and one cannot be reduced to the other or confused with it, in themselves each element contains the other, just as the other contains it, which implies movement. This does not mean that the pieces go quietly into a totality, but rather that the relationship is recreated in every moment in an undivided reality, in which elements can be distinguished with analytical eagerness, but that in their actuality do not exist separated from the rest, nor are they independent, but form a single movement. Complementarity is a communal dynamism; it defines the co-participation in the search and the ongoing construction of balance.

The principle of communal integrity is the condition of possible complementarity. Reality is movement, without fragmentation, and everything is interdependent. The world cannot be composed of autonomous spheres, whether they be subatomic particles or the legal field as separated from religion, but rather a flow that binds together natural and supernatural beings, the world and the unspeakable. The linguistic distinction that names an element separates it from the framework in the analysis, but it should be immediately remembered that this condition does not exist in the integrated reality of the communal horizon.

One consequence of this principle is that *serranos* establish dialogues and exchanges not only in the realm of the human and the natural, but also with the very distinct Other and the ineffable, that is born of the Earth and whose emissaries acquire peculiar forms, the spirits of the mountains and forests, or the Holy Cross. The hill or the field, for example, can provoke punishments (accidents, illness, the loss of the soul or the harvest) upon those men and women who are disrespectful in their relationship with the natural world.

The world is not divided into subject and object. The plurality of people linked to one another is recognized, plants like corn (which have a heart), or animals such as bulls (which have a soul), are recognized as linked, woven in a single movement with Us. Communal integrality establishes interdependence between the simple or unexpected everyday events and the transcendental. As in the case of the loss of a bull, the family conducts a *limpia*, sweeping the bodies with a

candle and praying, in order to open it up to the sacred and make propitiation that will allow the bull to find its way back.

In conformity with the principle of integrality, the legal is not separated from the communal world: it includes the civil, the sacred and the supernatural. The vernacular language and the territory are the sediment of the communal myth, but local norms, the oral tradition and communal work are its concrete morphological realizations and define what is the communal. The *tequio*, oral tradition and the *milpa*⁹ are technologies of Us.

The celebration of everyday listening and speaking, the face-to-face encounter, fosters what is the communal and reorders the communal experience. It is what is said, powered by how it is said. In practice, work and the joy of words and the listening between everyone is more important than what is actually said and its grammar. The rationalization that legitimates a discourse weighs much less than the grace put into it: its truth lies in the *guelaguetza* it generates.

By linking harmony with the principles of *guelaguetza*, reciprocity, complementarity and integrality; with the fundamentals of the authority, work and fiesta; with the institutions of the assembly and the *cargo* system; and with the concepts of service and grace, what is harmony, the harmonious condition, appears in the communal world as something desired and desirable, which is the result of the full relationship between men and women and with the complete reality.

The incarnation of harmony

To give concreteness to the expression of harmony within the myth of communality, we focus now on the Zapotec pueblos located in the Rincón of the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca, particularly in the community *Bēni xidza*¹⁰ of Santa Cruz Yagavila, derived from talks with Don Pablo Cruz, a man who by virtue of living in relation with others became wise.

To consider and experience harmony in Yagavila also starts with the distinction of two matrix movements, an inward and an outward. Communal harmony, or the lack thereof, is based on the not necessarily coherent or kind rotations of these spirals. For Don Pablo the conflict is somewhat encouraged by the ideas that come from outside and which disrupt an inside which he believes to be stable, the Outside that since the Conquest is also inside and contributes to the formation of Us.

In Yagavila, inside, among the people, *tu chh'ia* flows, 'what is all right and has no face, the energy, the word.' The *Bēni xidza* do not consider *tu chh'ia* a substance but rather a shared well-being, a full empathy that consumes Us. It is the joint vibration of the living: the encounter, the coexistence and the exchange of human beings with other beings through the positive energy that they themselves promote in their way of acting together with the other; a *compartencia*. *Tu chh'ia*

would be one way to achieve the principle of *guelaguetza* in this community in the Rincón of the Sierra in Oaxaca.

Tu chh'ia is not the product of spontaneous generation or an unassailable decision of the gods. Harmony is built on the logic of reciprocity, beginning with a vigorous process of mutual hospitality. The *Bëni xidza* say: *waka lenbëchi liuzam*, which can be translated as 'let the other enter into my heart, while I'm in theirs.' This hospitality and self-acceptance rebind us in grace and define the person in community with others. It is the ethical and historical disposition that stems from the recognition of foundational diversity (inward and outward, we and the other, natural and supernatural...) and the need for it to be complemented in reciprocity in order to reintegrate the world. 'We host death in our lives and we must learn to recognize it,' warns Don Pablo. *Waka lenbëchi liuzaro* is the path towards the emergence of *tooyia* – a realization of the principle of communal reciprocity between the *Bëni xidza*. Again, the momentum from the ethical to the aesthetic. These two notions indicate how harmony is procured in Yagavila.

The flow of *tu chh'ia* is the experience of the totality, but it is not a permanent state, on the contrary, it is always a provisional union that people must maintain and, when appropriate, restore. The vital flow stops, hospitality ends, the *Us* is diluted and everything is broken when selfishness appears. The *I* singular is placed before *Us*. The private mutilates the communal. The desire to accumulate and compete – instead of participating and sharing – changes the attitude towards life. The person or group thinks from the position of 'masters of reason.' Nobody is hospitable to anyone else and a radical separation from the other is experienced. From there, the person – a knot in a net of real, concrete relationships – is reduced to the individual – an atom of abstract categories, which leaves aside its unfathomable singularity and is instead simply compared and equated with the other, such that the dissolution of diversity, for a supposed homogenizing equality, opens the way to conflict.

For the *Bëni xidza*, 'the selfish believe that the earth belongs to them and does not host death. He has a dirty heart.'

The basis for well-being among the *Bëni xidza*, according to Don Pablo, would be to acknowledge at the same time unity and difference with the other. *tula pas nakaro*: 'We are alike and we are different.' The tension is constant, the movement incessant in the formation of *Us*. It is work, this perennial yes, to create territory. Not for nothing, when one speaks of recreating the life and sowing the earth in *didza xidza*, the language of the Zapotecs of the Rincón, one uses the same verb: *gaazaro*.

How does one restore the flow of *tu chh'ia* when it has been broken by selfishness? Ideally, how does one solve a conflict and renew a mutual sense of hospitality? Don Pablo says, 'with what out there they call friendship.' And this would be, finally, the name of peace in Yagavila.¹¹

Notes

1. Neither in academia nor in the United Nations system exists a generally accepted definition of the term *pueblo*. One school of thought considers it a sociological category: it is applied to groups that share certain identifiable characteristics. Others accept it as a political and legal concept, which applies to all residents of a territory or a state, regardless of its features. Often the word *pueblo*, or nation, is used to describe a group of people who share a history, culture, territory and project.
2. The term is bounded in connection with the so-called Indian pueblos, a term that remains the subject of intense controversy. Almost all the groups which this term makes reference to refer to themselves in their own terms, different for each group and generally reject any denomination that seeks to encompass them all. The expression *pueblos indios* is commonly used to refer to communities and villages that existed before the formation of nation-states in the American continent, who have maintained until now their own forms of cultural existence distinct from those used by the dominant societies within which they are found inserted, and who continue affirming themselves in these forms in order to orient their thoughts and behavior and reclaim their autonomy.
3. According to one version concerning the origin of the word Zapotec, it was derived from a Nahuatl word, *tzapotecatl*, related to the *zapote*, a tree that abounds in some of the land that is considered Zapotec. It is said that the Mexicas used this generic term to refer to different groups, all of which used different words, in their different languages, to refer to themselves. There is no common term, in the current languages of those groups, which distinguishes all the so-called 'Zapotecs,' a term that arose, like the term Indian, from the desire to attach, from the outside, an abstract label on very different realities that were supposed to form a union. The words that, in the different 'Zapotec' languages, are used to recognize themselves, can be translated as 'real people,' 'people of the true word,' 'people of the wise word,' 'people who speak a language,' 'people of the Sierra mountains' (or another region) and so on. These are words that generally identify a specific way of speaking...with the result that there are multiple forms.
4. We are not discovering the wheel. Studies of the Zapotecs almost always record this impression. Some time ago, Julio de la Fuente (1960) expressed it this way: 'Notwithstanding the lack of data on the Zapotec group, what is known of its culture allows for the proposal of the hypothesis that we are not faced with one culture but rather several.' In recognizing the differentiated current status of these different human groups and their antecedents, anthropologists now argue that the 'current ethno-linguistic groups' (such as the 'macroetnia' of the Zapotecs) are 'polisegmentary configurations without political integration, within which a variable number of ethnic group organizations are registered' (Barabas, 1999, p. 19). We have the impression, however, that scholars do not derive the logical consequences of this realistic perception. After planting this warning at the beginning of their work, they proceed to describe the whole Zapotec union, at most separating it into some subsets. The analysis, therefore, tends to stay at the level of abstract generalizations that appear to be increasingly far from a diversified and changing reality.
5. An analogy could be drawn to the romance languages in saying that the Zapotecs are as similar to each other as Romanian, French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. As in the case of the romance languages, a short period of interaction may allow for intelligibility between speakers of various Zapotec languages, 'because many words have common roots.' Intellectuals of the different Zapotec linguistic groups argue 'that

the variations, though significant, can be unified in order to form a single language (Barabas, 1999, p. 61).

5. We note with fascination the increasingly intense debates that have been conducted at the heart of the so-called field of legal anthropology, but we did not find in them a way to escape the modern occidental legal ethnocentrism, which still continues to infect it. We believe that the most that can be done, in the tradition of legal pluralism, which has been opening itself up to new paths in recent years, is to identify some homeomorphic equivalents, that is, concepts and practices that seem to have an analogous or similar role in different cultures. See Krotz (2002) on legal anthropology. On legal pluralism, see Panikkar (1979, 1993, 1995) and Robert Vachon (1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1993).
6. If we arrive at a remote community, and we start to talk about an agrarian conflict, there will be a moment when the oldest of our friends will go to his hut and display the title that the Spanish Crown gave to his ancestors, recognizing his right to the lands that he still occupies. It is possible that no one in the pueblo can read this document, but they are forced to refer to it in case of conflict. In many communities the relationships between neighbors and their mutual confidence still defines issues associated with the occupation and use of land, which in its design cannot be owned. They still employ rituals in order to regularly ratify *colindancias* (the territorial limits of a community) mutually agreed upon. They still honor the word transmitted from father to son that alludes to a type of relationship with the cosmos, prominently including the Mother Earth and her children. Increasingly, however, interaction with others requires that they refer to documents, even among the illiterate, in order to defend their existence and traditions. With the proliferation of documents, agrarian conflicts also multiply, which often end in violence.
7. The positive law used in almost all countries, recognizes the differences among individuals and the circumstances of each case through the construction of abstract categories in the population (children, women, etc.), for whom the law is applied differentially, and through the legal definition of aggravating or mitigating factors in the crimes that judges should take into account in each case. These distinctions, which are established within the framework of the formal treatment based on the application of the law, remain within the fundamental assumption that there exists an absolute similarity between individuals and that they must all be treated in the same way: they are all human beings, all are individual atoms of abstract categories: all should be considered equal in the eyes of the law, which must not show any preference. And so, an ancient metaphysical definition – all souls are equal in the eyes of God – and a specific historical struggle against the privileges of the nobility, found the occidental obsession with the equality of individuals, which not only reduces them in abstract uniformity but also legitimizes real injustice, based in illegitimate hierarchies such as money. The current prototype of this exercise is the case of O.J. Simpson. The person who led his team of lawyers, Alan Dershowitz, made visible the reality that they are obliged by the law to use the law for the benefit of their clients, who are often criminals. It is no longer a question of 'delivering justice' but rather of completing an efficient professional exercise that can be translated, in practice, as freedom for criminals and death for innocent people.
8. The term was coined, simultaneously and independently, by Jaime Martínez Luna Zapotēc of Guelatao, in the Sierra de Juárez, and by Floriberto Díaz, Mixe, to share with others the communal way of being. See, among others, Maldonado (2002), Robles and Cardoso (2007) and Jaime Martínez Luna (1995).

9. The traditional combination of corn, beans and squash, cultivated together in the same field and usually accompanied by more than a hundred different plants, growing wildly in the *milpa* and usually called *quelites*.
10. This expression means 'people of the Rincón,' the name that the communities of this area of the Sierra gave to themselves; it is what in anthropology is called an ethno-linguistic group.
11. Bibliographical clues: The work of A.M. Barabas (1999) and the one she published with M. Bartolomé in Millán and Valle (2003) contains the best ethnographic documentation on the Zapotecs. Bibliographies of these texts and of the book by Whitecotton (1984) (still considered a classic) are very comprehensive. See also Carmagnani (1988), Newbold Chiñas (1992), Ríos (1994), Pérez García (1996), Bennholdt-Thomsen (1997), Stephen (1998) and González (2001). Michael Kearney (1996) has published the results of his research in California concerning Zapotec, Mixtec and other indigenous pueblos in the United States in California. Laura Nader (1990) has conducted numerous studies on the social structure, ways of resolving conflicts and regulatory systems in various indigenous areas and particularly among indigenous Zapotec of the Sierra. As for the debate on the legal issues, see Krotz (2002) and the work of Panikkar (1979, 1993, 1995) and Vachon (1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1993). In the case of Oaxaca and the Zapotecs, see, in particular, Carmen Cordero (1982, 1995, 1996, 1997). On the ongoing struggle for autonomy and its connection to Zapatismismo, see, among many other texts, Esteva (1994, 1998, 2002).

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